

Remarks at a Reception for Gubernatorial Candidate Peter F. Vallone in
New York City
October 12, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. First of all, let me thank Mayor Dinkins for his presence here tonight and his friendship and the many things he did for the people of New York and the many things that he's done for me over the years. And Peter, I want to tell you that I appreciate being invited to come by and be with your friends tonight and your supporters. I thank you and Tena for making this race, and I thank you for the personal support you have given me. I'm very grateful for that.

[At this point, a telephone rang.]

The President. Somebody answer that phone. [Laughter]

I'd also like to thank you for letting me—I've got one nonpaying guest here tonight, my senior Senator from Arkansas, Dale Bumpers, who's back there. He is universally considered to be the best speaker in the United States Senate, so if we were really being generous, I'd let him talk, and I'd sit down tonight. But I'll pull rank a little bit.

I want to make a couple of points, if I might. First of all, our country is in good shape. Compared to 6 years ago, we are in much better shape. We've got the first surplus in 29 years and the smallest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years and the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the highest homeownership in history. That's the good news.

But the important thing is that at this moment, we can't just sit around and enjoy that. We have to build on it. This is a record to build on, not to sit on, because we live—as everybody in New York City knows, here, the financial capital of our country, we are living in a very dynamic world. And there are a lot of things going on out there. Some of them are good, and some of them are quite challenging.

Not only that, there are a lot of challenges we haven't met here at home. And the reason that we're back in Washington working on this budget now, trying so hard—here we are just 3 weeks before an election—to get a budget passed, and this is the first time in 24 years

that the United States Congress has not passed a budget resolution with their own budget plan. But the reason we're doing it is because we know we still have big challenges out there.

We have got—just to take one example that's very important in New York—we have got to keep the economic growth going by maintaining our leadership in the global economy and stabilizing all these troubles elsewhere; otherwise, they'll come back here to hurt us. That's what this International Monetary Fund issue is all about.

We have got to expand economic opportunity into the poorest inner-city neighborhoods and rural areas in this country which haven't received them. Secretary Cuomo, from New York, the HUD Secretary, has got a great program up here that he and the Vice President put together to get more investment into those areas. And for the last 4 days, if you've been paying attention to the news, you know I've been involved in a pitched battle trying to pass the education plan that I sent to Washington—to Congress in January, for smaller classes in the early grades, for modernizing and building 5,000 schools, for hooking up all our classrooms to the Internet, for giving children after-school and summer school programs and mentoring programs for middle school kids from troubled neighborhoods so they can know they can go on to college if they settle down and do a good job in school.

We're fighting a huge battle that Senator Bumpers has really helped us on, on the environment, where every year now—every single year—we have to look at 10 or 15 bills having nothing to do, very often, with the environment, being littered with what they call riders in Washington, designed to undermine America's commitment to environmental protection at the very time when we know more than we ever have before about how to grow the economy and improve the environment.

We didn't succeed in passing the Patients' Bill of Rights, but we need to keep working until we do, because I think if someone gets hit—God forbid—going out of this hotel tonight, by a car, you shouldn't have to go all the way

across town to an emergency room just because that's the only one covered by your HMO. If your doctor tells you you need a specialist, you ought to be able to get it. And you ought to know that your medical records are private. Those are just some of the things we're trying to do.

Now, what's that got to do with the Governor's race? A lot. The answer is a lot. There are some things that the President can do that will affect the country as a whole, independent of what is going on in the communities of America, the cities of America, or the States of America. You know, I have to get this International Monetary Fund funding passed. I have to come up with a plan to, in my judgment, reform the global financial system so that we avoid some sort of catastrophe here. That's my job. Tonight my Special Envoy for Kosovo, Dick Holbrooke, is briefing our NATO allies about what we're trying to do to make peace in Kosovo. Those are things that the President only can do.

But in education, in crime control—when we passed the crime bill to put 100,000 police on the street, that money went through the Governors and the mayors. If we pass a bill in the Congress to put 100,000 teachers in the classroom, that money will go through the Governors, and to some extent, the large local school districts.

But the Governors of this country have primary responsibility in so many areas—relating to education, relating to law enforcement, relating to the environment, relating to economic growth in a specific area. And if you look at Peter Vallone's record here in New York City, I defy you to find another city official anywhere else in America who has been as innovative in three things that all go together: improving education, fighting crime, and being responsible with the budget. You will not find a better record of reform from any big-city official anywhere in the United States. And I think that is very important.

Now, why is that important? Because whatever we do in Washington, it has to be made live on the streets of America, in the communities, and in the States. And I can tell you—I was a Governor for 12 years; I know a little about that job. And as we move into this next period of our Nation's history, we have given you the smallest Federal Government in 35 years. We have focused far more on empowering the American people to solve their own prob-

lems and less on setting up new bureaucracies. But we have also given big, big new responsibilities to the States. The Governors will have more to do than anybody else with whether we really succeed in adding 5 million children to the ranks of those with health insurance. The Governors will have a great deal to do with deciding whether all these funds we're trying to get in education actually lift the learning of our children all across America. And I could go on and on and on.

So I'm here not just because this man is my friend and he has stood up for me, but because, far more important, he has stood up for and led the people of New York City in an exemplary way, in a reformist way, building a better future for our children.

And let me just make one last point that's very much on my mind today. I'm sure that most of you saw in the press that the young man who was beaten so badly in Wyoming passed away today. We don't know the facts of the case, and none of us should comment on them or prejudge anyone. But the indications are that he was beaten so badly because he was gay, by people who were either full of hatred or full of fear or both. And yet if you think about it, the thing that's special about America is that we're supposed to create a place for every law-abiding citizen in this country, no matter how different we all are, one from another—by race, by religion, by circumstance, by neighborhood—no matter what.

One of the things I have tried hardest to do as President—I think with more success in the country than in Washington, DC—is to reconcile Americans to one another and to make us all understand that we don't have to be afraid of each other if we share the same values, follow the same rules, and are committed to building the same kind of future. That's another reason I'd like to see Peter Vallone have a chance to serve as Governor, because I think he's that kind of person.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:25 p.m. in Conrad Salon E at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Mayor David Dinkins of New York City; Mr. Vallone's wife, Tena; and murder victim Matthew Shepard.